OMB No. 10024-0018

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

### PROMITED

## National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

OCT-2-8 1993

per from L

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in Hew to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property
historic name Central School
other names/site number
2. Location
street & number414 Watkins StreetN/A $\Box$ not for publication
city or townN/A □ vicinity
state <u>North Carolina</u> code <u>NC</u> county <u>Randolph</u> code <u>151</u> zip code <u>27204</u>
3. State/Federal Agency Certification
As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this \$\overline{\mathbb{X}}\$ nomination \( \precedent{\mathbb{C}}\) request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property \( \overline{\mathbb{M}}\) meets \( \precedent{\mathbb{C}}\) does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant \( \precedent{\mathbb{N}}\) nationally \( \precedent{\mathbb{N}}\) statewide \( \overline{\mathbb{M}}\) locally. \( \precedent{\mathbb{N}}\) See continuation sheet for additional comments.)  Signature of certifying official/Title \( \overline{\mathbb{D}}\) Date
State of Federal agency and bureau
In my opinion, the property $\square$ meets $\square$ does not meet the National Register criteria. ( $\square$ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
State or Federal agency and bureau
4. National Park Service Certification
I hereby certify that the property is:  Signature of the Keeper  Date of Action
entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register ☐ See continuation sheet.
determined not eligible for the National Register.
removed from the National Register.
Other, (explain:)

Central	School School
Name of Proper	ty

Randolph	County,	NC	
County and State			

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Res (Do not include pre	sources within Proper eviously listed resources in the	ty ne count.)
🗓 private		Contributing	Noncontributing	
public-local	district	1	0	buildings
<ul><li>☐ public-State</li><li>☐ public-Federal</li></ul>	☐ site □ structure			_
_ pasiio : caciai	☐ object			
		1	0	Total
Name of related multiple p (Enter "N/A" if property is not part	roperty listing of a multiple property listing.)	Number of cor in the National	ntributing resources p Register	reviously listed
N/A		none		
6. Function or Use				
<b>Historic Functions</b> (Enter categories from instructions)		Current Function (Enter categories from		
EDUCATION/School		VACANT/NOT	IN USE	
7. Description				
Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)		Materials (Enter categories from	instructions)	
Other: scholastic f	unctionalism	foundation1	orick	
International Style		walls	orick	
		roof	asphalt	
		other		

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance	
Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)	Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)  EDUCATION
A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.	ETHNIC HERITAGE/BLACK ARCHITECTURE
☐ <b>B</b> Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.	
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.	Period of Significance  1926 - 1943
☐ <b>D</b> Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.	
Criteria Considerations (Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)	Significant Dates 1926
Property is:	
☐ <b>A</b> owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.	
☐ <b>B</b> removed from its original location.	Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)  N/A
☐ <b>C</b> a birthplace or grave.	Cultural Affiliation
□ <b>D</b> a cemetery.	N/A
☐ <b>E</b> a reconstructed building, object, or structure.	
☐ <b>F</b> a commemorative property.	
☐ <b>G</b> less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.	Architect/Builder unknown
Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)	)
9. Major Bibliographical References	
<b>Bibilography</b> (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on or	ne or more continuation sheets.)
Previous documentation on file (NPS):	Primary location of additional data:
□ preliminary determination of individual listing (36	<ul> <li>State Historic Preservation Office</li> <li>□ Other State agency</li> <li>□ Federal agency</li> <li>□ Local government</li> <li>□ University</li> <li>□ Other</li> <li>Name of repository:</li> </ul>
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #	

Central School	Randolph County, NC
Name of Property	County and State
10. Geographical Data	
Acreage of Property1. 902	
UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)	
1 1/7 6 0 8 2 0 0 3 9 5 2 3 0 0 Northing 2 1 Northing	Zone Easting Northing  4
Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)	et est sommand of sold.
<b>Boundary Justification</b> (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)	
11. Form Prepared By	
	research assistance from Addie Luther L. MacKay Whatley, Jr., of Asheboro)
organization Department of History, UNC C	hapel Hilldate August 1993
street & number 204 Spring Lane	telephone <u>(919) 967 - 0836</u>
city or townChapel Hill,	state NC zip code 27514
Additional Documentation	
Submit the following items with the completed form:	
Continuation Sheets	
Maps	
A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating t	he property's location.
A Sketch map for historic districts and properties	naving large acreage or numerous resources.
Photographs	
Representative black and white photographs of t	ne property.
Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)	
Property Owner	
(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)	
nameEast Side Improvement Associa	tion
street & number PO Box 2616	telephone <u>(919) 625 – 5291</u>
city or town Asheboro	state _NC zip code27204 2616
	ed for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seg.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Central School, Randolph County, NC

#### ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

#### The Site

Central School stands at the heart of the East Side neighborhood in Asheboro, a small courthouse town serving the county of Randolph in North Carolina's Piedmont region. Though African-Americans have owned land and built houses in the East Side area since the 1900s, most structures today appear to date from the 1920s - 1960s. The school property occupies half a block bounded on the west by Watkins Street, on the south by Frank Street, and on the north by Brewer Street. The 1926 building and the 1948 wing face Watkins Street. The lot slopes gently up from Watkins Street. A low retaining wall consisting of three courses of plain concrete block runs along the street; the school sits perhaps ten yards back from that. Behind the school is a tarmac driveway and parking lot, which forms the eastern boundary of the nominated tract. Behind the parking lot stands the 1952 free-standing red brick gymnasium, to the southeast, and the later free-standing one-story red brick elementary building (extensively renovated as a daycare center circa 1990) to the northeast -- these two buildings are not included in this nomination. Land continues to slope upward into the residential area behind the school.

#### The 1926 Building

Asheboro's 1926 Central School building draws its design directly from plans published by the Julius Rosenwald Fund. In floorplan the building resembles a "T" with the front (top) of the "T" facing due west. Classrooms line a central corridor in the front wing, and an auditorium extends to the rear. Stylistically the exterior is a functional-looking symmetrical composition of red brick and wooden windows, with the barest hint of Bungalow influence in the treatment of roof details. The structure has been altered very little over the years.

\* \* \*

The 1926 building rests on a red brick foundation and exterior walls are constructed of the same material. The brick are laid in common bond, with a header course every sixth course. The brickwork is very straightforward; a slightly corbelled double course marks the sill of each window, but otherwise there is no special trim, not even a watercourse to mark a break between the foundation and main walls. A central front porch projects from the main block. Its base and steps, along with a second set of steps on the south end of the structure, feature the same brickwork as the main walls. At the southwest corner of the building, facing south, is a white marble cornerstone that was brought from the previous Asheboro Colored Graded School. It bears the date 1911, signifying the construction of that earlier building.

Abundant light was a major concern in the design of Rosenwald schools, and the results can be seen in the big banks of original double-hung sash units across the front of the 1926 building. Windows and doors are arranged symmetrically in the facade. Under the porch roof, the main entrance to the building features a pair of doors that appear to be

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original, each one made of wood with a nine-pane window and two panels below. The doorway is topped by a 12-pane fixed transom and flanked by 3-pane sidelights. On either side of this entry-unit is a small individual 6-over-6 pane double-hung window. Beyond the porch are banks of 9-over-9 pane windows lighting two classrooms to the left and two to the right. Each classroom has multiple windows, creating a "6 - 5 - porch - 5 - 6" rhythm across the facade. This pattern differs just a bit from that in the published plans, which used a "5 - 5 - porch - 5 - 5" arrangement. Rosenwald schools typically did not follow pattern book designs exactly in matters of fenestration arrangement.

Similar symmetrically arranged windows continue around the 1926 building. On the back of the main wing and on the sides of the auditorium wing, 9-over-9 pane double-hung windows are grouped in 3s and 6s. The south end of the main wing features two pairs of 6-over-6 pane windows. These flank a central doorway. Each of the two doors has a four-pane window with three panels below and one panel above; these doors appear to be original. Above the doorway is a 12-pane fixed transom, shaded by a small gable roof supported by heavy Bungalow-style brackets. In the wall above the roof is a vertical opening with a wooden louver intended to cool the attic. The back end of the auditorium wing is even plainer. It is simply a blank brick wall with a door at each side (the doorways were part of the original design; one has been bricked in, and the other has a door that appears not to be original), and a vertical louvered opening above.

The 1926 building has a gable roof covered with asphalt shingles of relatively recent vintage. Eaves extend outward from the building a couple of feet and show exposed rafter ends that reflect the Bungalow style popular for residential architecture in the 1920s. At the front of the building, two shed-roofed dormers with wood-shingled siding and eight-pane windows pierce the main roof. The dormers flank the central front porch, whose gable roof rests upon four plain square wooden columns. The gable peak is finished with vertical weatherboard siding.

Only relatively minor changes have affected the exterior of the 1926 building. The addition of the 1948 wing (described below) covered the north end of the main wing. One window on the auditorium was replaced with a double door. On the rear of the main wing, north of the auditorium and hidden from view from the street, a bank of windows was removed in 1948 or later. A double door was inserted in part of the opening, a large brick exterior chimney was built, and the rest of the opening was bricked in. During the years that the structure has stood vacant, weather and vandalism have caused deterioration of many of the original window frames. Little glass remains, and while the original arrangement of sash and mullions is still clearly visible, the wood is broken and rotted.

\* \* \*

The interior of the 1926 building likewise retains much of its original layout and detailing. Eight rooms, plus an entrance hall and the auditorium, originally lined the central corridor that runs the length of the main wing. Along the front of the building were four full-sized classrooms and entrance hall; all are intact today. Along the back of the wing,

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Rosenwald plans called for two more full-sized classrooms, the auditorium, and a smaller "industrial room" and an "office and library;" in recent years the "industrial room" and the northeast classroom have been combined into one large space via the demolition of a wall. Recent temporary partitions have created two smaller cubicles inside this room. A similar easily-removable partition has also subdivided the entrance hall into two rooms.

Decor is spartan in the 1926 structure, retaining high tongue-and-groove wooden ceilings, plaster walls and some original trim. The central corridor and the entrance hall feature tongue-and-groove wainscoting with a wide mop board and a molded chair rail (missing in some places). Along the corridor, small rectangular three-pane "breeze windows" high up in the walls help bring light and air from the classrooms. Doorways to the classrooms retain their transom windows, though all the original doors were replaced with new ones probably in the 1950s or 1960s. Inside the classrooms, the wainscoting continues. Blackboards survive in most rooms, though seriously deteriorated. The four front classrooms each include a cloakroom running the full length of one wall, a characteristic feature of the Rosenwald designs. Several original doors, each with five horizontal panels, survive on the cloakrooms. Throughout the 1926 building the window and door surrounds are simple wide boards, yet another touch of the Bungalow style. Remnants of electric lighting remain -- a mix of florescent and incandescent ceiling fixtures that are likely not original -- as do the bulky radiators of the school's steam-heat system.

The largest interior feature of the 1926 building is the auditorium, a flat-floored space which opens off the main corridor and extends back to form the rear wing. Rosenwald plans suggested a wall between the classroom corridor and the auditorium, but that wall was evidently omitted here to create a larger and more flexible space. Side walls have tongue-and-grove wainscoting, and similar wood sheaths the front of the stage. Electric light fixtures, which once probably held globe lights suspended from their chains, appear to date from the 1920s and form two rows along the ceiling. The stage, raised five steps above the floor, occupies the east end of the space.

#### The 1948 wing

In 1948, the Randolph County Board of Education awarded bids for the construction of a substantial addition to the school. The \$63,000 north wing roughly doubled the size of the facility, adding classrooms, indoor bathrooms, and a lower-level space for a cafeteria and a vocational classroom. Today weather and vandalism have taken their toll on this wing, but except for deterioration, the 1948 building looks much as it did when it opened.

The exterior of the 1948 wing uses red brick and has general proportions that echo those of the older building, but in other ways it asserts stylistic allegiance to the International Style popular at mid-century. Instead of a gabled roof the wing has a flat roof. Instead of wooden, symmetrically-arranged windows, the wing features metal-framed windows and door openings, arranged asymmetrically. The basic window unit uses 2-over-4-over-4 fixed panes; each classroom is lit by a bank of 5 window units. The

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building's main (upper) floor is at the same level as that of the Rosenwald building. The lower level takes advantage of the gently sloping site; front windows are at ground level, but rear cafeteria windows are below ground in a light well that runs along the back of the structure. A brick portico shades a front entrance to the lower level. At the north end of the building, heavy brick stairs lead to an upper entrance, while simultaneously sheltering another lower entrance. The original metal double doors, each with two panes of glass above a solid panel, survive in poor repair.

Inside, the 1948 wing has four classrooms upstairs, plus a restroom and a small office. They line a central hall that continues the hall of the 1926 building. Instead of wooden wainscoting and plaster, the interior finish is painted concrete block with a linoleum tile floor. Classroom doors have metal surrounds, and hinged transoms above. The restroom and office and a stairwell (enclosed in recent years) are at the end of hall immediately adjoining the older building.

Downstairs there is a similar central hall. Along the back of the building is another restroom, then the cafeteria, which is divided into a dining room and a food-prep space that includes its own small restroom and storage room. The front of the building is comprised of a large classroom with two small office-like spaces off it. Community residents remember that this area was used for Home Economics classes.

NPS Form 10-900-a (8-86) OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

### **United States Department of the Interior**National Park Service

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#### Summary of Historical Significance

Central School is nominated to the National Register under Criterion A: Education and Black Ethnic Heritage, and Criterion C: Architecture. Erected in 1926 in the East Side neighborhood of the small town of Asheboro, Randolph County, North Carolina, the structure is a well-preserved example of the Rosenwald Schools built for African-American children throughout the South in the early twentieth century. Some construction money came from the county school board, but much was donated by black private citizens and by the Julius Rosenwald Fund. The Fund, established by the president of Sears, Roebuck and Company to aid Southern black education, also provided state-of-the-art plans for the structure. Central School is a one story, gable-roofed brick building based directly on the design entitled "Seven Teacher Community School, to Face East or West Only," published in the Fund's 1924 pattern book Community School Plans, Bulletin #3. (Exhibit A) The 1926 structure is in good original condition. Weather and vandalism have caused deterioration of window frames, but window openings have not been filled in, a common alteration to Rosenwald schools elsewhere in North Carolina. Even the interior wainscoting and wooden floors and ceilings typical of Rosenwald designs remain intact in some areas of Central School. A large two-level International Style wing was added to the north end of the original building in 1948, nearly doubling the facility's size but barely disturbing the Rosenwald structure. Behind the original building stand a gymnasium building and an elementary classroom building, both erected in the 1950s and separated from the nominated tract by a north-south driveway and parking area that bisect the school property. For much of its history Central School was the only secondary school serving black residents of Randolph County. It formed an integral part of black life for thousands of families, not only as an educational facility, but as a county-wide center for community events until it closed in 1969. Today Central School remains the centerpiece of one of Asheboro's largest African-American neighborhoods, and the neighborhood organization is working to achieve its adaptive reuse as apartments for elderly and handicapped persons.

#### Historical Context Statement Criterion A: African-American Heritage and Education

Central School is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local history in the areas of education and black ethnic heritage. In operation from 1926 to 1969, Central School was for much of its history the only public school in Randolph County offering secondary education to African Americans. It functioned not only as an educational hub for the county, but also as a community center for black citizens of Asheboro's East Side neighborhood. It stands as a reminder of the racially segregated system of education in the South, which continued until 1964 in Randolph County. It also symbolizes local and national philanthropic efforts to improve education for black Americans under that system; funds for the structure were raised by the local black community and supplemented by Chicago philanthropist Julius Rosenwald.

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Asheboro developed as the main courthouse and market town for Randolph County, located in the gently rolling hills of the North Carolina piedmont. The county was largely a place of small farms until the arrival of railroads in the 1890s. Farming remained a mainstay, but furniture manufacturing and (for whites) textile manufacturing added a degree of new economic momentum. By the mid-twentieth century, Randolph boasted some 50,000 citizens, 7,000 of whom lived at the county seat.<sup>1</sup>

As elsewhere in the South, public education came slowly to Randolph County for whites and even more slowly for blacks. The first halting step had taken place back in 1839 when the state legislature suggested that counties establish schools for white children, and set up a Literary Fund to provide small amounts of money to assist localities in the task.<sup>2</sup> For black children, however state law specifically prohibited education during the slavery era before the Civil War. After the War, the new Republican Party made the first concerted effort to bring schooling to all North Carolinians, black and white. The Constitution of 1868 mandated free schools for all children ages six to twenty-one. But as old-line Democrats regained control of state and local government following Reconstruction, they often refused to appropriate money to obey the provisions of the Constitution.<sup>3</sup> Northern religious groups made efforts to fill the void, raising funds and sending missionaries South to help build and staff schools for whites and especially for the newly-freed blacks. In central North Carolina, long a Quaker stronghold, the Baltimore Association of Friends (Quaker) was particularly active.<sup>4</sup> Mr. William Mead, a Quaker from Brooklyn, New York, arrived in Asheboro in 1882 or 1883 to serve as principal of an Asheboro Negro School.<sup>5</sup>

Despite such philanthropy, schooling in Randolph County, as elsewhere in North Carolina, remained rudimentary. Schools were mostly one-room affairs, operating during the weeks when children were not needed for farm chores, and providing students with only a few years of elementary education. Not until new economic forces were unleashed by improved railroad connections and industrial change did North Carolinians see much need for schooling beyond the basic "reading, 'riting and 'rithmatic."

Modern schools arrived on the heels of the nationwide Progressive movement around the turn of the century. Progressivism took as its one of it main aims the upgrading of education, so that all Americans might better take part in nation's rapidly-expanding

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Whatley, Architectural History of Randolph County, pp. 184 - 198.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Lefler and Newsome, North Carolina, pp. 368 - 369, 384 - 385, 403 - 404.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Lefler and Newsome, North Carolina, pp. 531 - 532, 534 - 537.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> "Randoph County Schools," p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Robins, <u>Sketches of My Asheboro</u>, p. 25.

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commercial economy. North Carolina's largest industrial cities began building the state's first "graded" schools in the 1880s, and the movement got a boost when Progressive governor Charles B. Aycock made public education a key plank in his election platform in 1900. Over the next years, more and more North Carolina communities adopted the notion of graded schools. In 1909 Asheboro, inspired by its newfound railroad prosperity, built a handsome brick Graded School for white children on Fayetteville Street. Two years later, a smaller wooden Asheboro Colored Graded School was erected on Greensboro Street at the edge of the city for black children.

Again, it fell to outside philanthropists to create a semblance of equal opportunity for North Carolina's African-American population. A number of Progressive-era industrialists, including Standard Oil's John D. Rockefeller and the Southern Railway's William Baldwin, expressed concern that the under-educated South was holding back the economic progress of the nation as a whole. Indeed, as the historian Louis Harlan has shown, local outlays for black schooling were falling further and further behind those for whites during the Progressive years.<sup>2</sup> In the 1910s, one businessman decided to take special aim at the problem of substandard school buildings. Julius Rosenwald of Chicago was growing rich as president of the mammoth mail-order concern Sears, Roebuck and Company. Rosenwald, son of a poor Jewish peddler, made the decision to use part of his new wealth to improve the lot of other less-fortunate Americans. In partnership with black educator Booker T. Washington, Rosenwald devised a program to help African-Americans all across the South erect community schools.<sup>3</sup>

The Rosenwald program was intended to both erect schools and foster commitment to their operation. Julius Rosenwald put up about one-fourth of the cost of each new structure, and provided state-of-the-art plans for efficient buildings. The local black community was charged with raising a matching amount -- a daunting task in an era when most blacks were sharecroppers and domestics who seldom saw much cash money. Finally, the local white community was expected to contribute toward the construction, and the white-dominated local school board had to agree to staff and operate the facility once construction was finished. The program was extremely successful. By its close in 1932, 5,357 Rosenwald buildings stood in fifteen Southern states.

Asheboro's Central School was one of approximately 14 seven-teacher schools erected in North Carolina with assistance from the Rosenwald Fund.<sup>4</sup> North Carolina was the most active state participating in the Fund, building 813 schools from the 1910s through 1932. Most of the buildings were small, ranging from one to four teachers, and most were of wood. But in the Fund's later years, an attempt was made to erect at least

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> "Randoph County Schools," p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Harlan, Separate and Unequal.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Embree and Waxman, <u>Investment in People</u>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Hanchett, "Rosenwald Schools and Black Education," pp. 389 - 444.

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one school in each county that would hold upper as well as lower grades, and many of these larger structures were of brick. It is not known how many Rosenwald buildings survive in North Carolina today.

#### Historical Context Statement Criterion C: Architecture

Central School embodies the distinctive architectural characteristics of the Rosenwald schools. Rosenwald administrator Samuel L. Smith had studied with pioneering Progressive educational architect Fletcher B. Dresslar, and Smith's first action upon taking charge of the Fund in 1920 was to develop state-of-the-art stock plans for Rosenwald Schools. The pattern books created under Smith's guidance embodied the era's best ideas for functional, efficient school design -- and in fact the Fund's widely distributed publications did much to define American educational architecture in the early twentieth century.

Functionalism was the guiding force in all aspects of the Rosenwald designs. Smith decreed that Rosenwald Schools were always to be one story tall, in order to minimize construction cost and maximize efficiency. The ground-hugging form was a marked contrast to the earlier Victorian vogue for imposing-looking multi-story educational structures. The main architectural feature of the Rosenwald Schools were their large banks of windows, an important tool for maximizing natural light in the era before electricity reached most rural communities. Schools were carefully sited to best catch all available sunlight; the ratio of window to floor area in each classroom was meticulously specified; and the Fund even required that pairs of tan window shades be used in each window, because they allowed better control of light than the traditional single green shade. Inside, Rosenwald Schools featured high ceilings and small interior "breeze windows" to promote air-circulation between classrooms and halls. Wall decoration was limited to simple wooden wainscoting, and the fund required that light-colored interior paints be used in order to better reflect and diffuse light within the classroom.

Central School's design is closely based on the "Seven Teacher Community School, to Face East or West Only," which appeared in the Fund's 1924 pattern book Community School Plans, Bulletin #3. The large banks of windows form a "6 - 5 - porch - 5 - 6" rhythm across the front facade of Central School, rather than the "5 - 5 - porch - 5 - 5" arrangement shown in the plan. Inside, a wall separating the auditorium from the hallway was evidently not built. Such minor departures from published designs were quite common among Rosenwald buildings in North Carolina. Otherwise Central School is right out of the pattern book, down to the interior wainscoting and breeze windows.

While it is not known how many of North Carolina's Rosenwald Schools remain today, Central School is surely among the state's best preserved examples surviving in original form. Most Rosenwald Schools were wood, and deteriorated quickly when no longer used daily for classes. A recent study showed that of 25 schools built with Fund aid

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in nearby Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, only 12 survive -- none of them as large or as well-preserved as Central School. Where the bigger Rosenwald buildings do still stand in the state, for instance DuBois School in the city of Wake Forest, they are often remodeled. Frugal school boards commonly blocked portions of the window openings, making the buildings more energy-efficient, but decreasing natural sunlight and compromising the characteristic Rosenwald appearance. At Central School, a wing was added in 1948 altering one end of the structure, but otherwise the school looks very much as it did when it opened.

### Historical Background

Asheboro's Rosenwald school stood at the center of a proud black neighborhood when its first classes met in 1926. A generation earlier the area had been the farmland of Elijah Moffitt, a white lawyer who served as Mayor of Asheboro 1905 - 1907. During the 1900s Moffitt began selling lots in his 64 1/2 acre tract on the eastern edge of the city to black residents. Among the first buyers were Lucy and Zachariah Franks, for whom present-day Frank Street is named, and Daniel Watkins, for whom Watkins Street is likely named.<sup>2</sup> After Moffitt's death in 1916 the subdivision was formally surveyed and named Moffitt Heights.<sup>3</sup> Moffitt's heirs continued selling land to African - American buyers, and surrounding landowners did as well. Today this area constitutes the predominantly black East Side neighborhood.

In the 1920s, residents of Moffitt Heights hit upon a strategy to win a school for their subdivision. Initially Julius Rosenwald's gifts had been reserved for rural schools, but during the 1920s, Rosenwald money became available for "consolidated" schools offering upper grades in farm towns. Asheboro's African-American community convinced the local school board to apply. News of the school's construction was cause for rejoicing throughout Randolph County. Zachariah Franks himself, a brick-mason by trade, laid the cornerstone in a celebration that featured fellow-members of his Odd Fellows fraternal order in their full regalia. On the January day when the building was completed, students from the old Asheboro Colored School on Greensboro Road marched triumphantly down the hill to the new facility, each carrying a chair from the old building.<sup>4</sup>

The Rosenwald structure was a great improvement. It had electric lights, and its seven classrooms meant that teachers could now offer upper-level (8th through 11th) grades -- though they still had to double up two grades in several classrooms. The old

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Hanchett, "Rosenwald Schools and Black Education."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Randolph County Register of Deeds Office, book 140, p. 2; book 170, p. 181.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Randolph County Register of Deeds Office, book PB 1, page 73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Ruth McCrae and Mary Harrison, interview with Thomas Hanchett at McCrae's home on Frank Street, February 1992.

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building "didn't have but four rooms" and four teachers, while the new one had seven rooms and seven teachers, remembers Ruth McCrae, who made the transition as a student. The brick school was also much sturdier. Recalls McCrae, "When we moved out of that building it was January . . . and we weren't out of that building but three months -- March -- when the wind blew that school down! Just completely flattened it! There was nothing standing." \( \)

Children came from all corners of Randolph County to take advantage of upper-grade education. In Central School's early years there were no buses for black youngsters. Instead, farm families would send children in to live with a relative in town during the school year. Those without the luxury of relatives might find accommodations as servants in Asheboro homes, cooking and cleaning in order to win the opportunity for education.

Central School was more than just a place for school children during the day, East Side residents remember. It was often the site of after-hours fund-raisers, in the form of fish fries, chicken pie suppers, ice cream suppers and cake walks, to benefit the needy in the community or to buy equipment for the school. One of the more popular events was the "box party," described by Ruth McCrae as "when ladies would fix a box of food and the gentlemen would bid on the box according to who made the box."<sup>2</sup> Many events were held to supplement the budget of the school itself, recalls McCrae, including an annual May Day celebration. "They had a pretty strong PTA. Everybody worked and raised money for it." But the wider community also regularly utilized the school's facilities, including the Odd Fellows and other civic organizations. "They used the auditorium to play basketball, have plays, and any church or community group who wanted to use it could have that privilege."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps most importantly, the school was the meeting place for the Asheboro Civic Club, the neighborhood association that played a vital role in lobbying for government action in the era when few African-Americans were allowed to vote or participate formally in municipal affairs. One of the Civic Club's major accomplishments came in 1963 when it succeeded to convincing the Asheboro City Council to hire the town's first black policeman, Bryan Headen.4

The most dynamic time in Central School's history seems to have been the late 1940s and 1950s. WWII helped energize a generation of black Southerners, who returned from military service impatient with the world of limited opportunity. One such individual at Central was James H. Morgan, who came to Asheboro after service in the elite brass band of the Navy In-Flight Training School. At Central High, Morgan taught math, physics, chemistry, biology, and -- for the first time in the school's history -- band. Students

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> McCrae and Harrison interview.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> McCrae and Harrison interview.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> McCrae and Harrison interview.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Negro Affairs Committee, Report to Mayor Robert L. Reese, August 8, 1963, and undated unattributed newspaper clipping, both in the files of the East Side Improvement Association.

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located instruments in Greensboro pawn shops and created uniforms out of cast-off clothes. Soon annual band concerts were a highlight of community life, and the band was winning renown at competitions outside the county.<sup>1</sup>

Morgan found an able ally in the person of Principal J. N. Gill.<sup>2</sup> Gill had arrived in 1946 and quickly displayed a persistent drive to secure a fair share of supplies and funds for his school from the white school board. In 1948, in part due to Gill's urging, the Board allocated money to replace a temporary wooden classroom that teachers had nicknamed "The Chicken Coop." In its stead rose a two-level brick wing that held additional classrooms (finally there would be one for each grade), indoor bathrooms, and a cafeteria.<sup>3</sup> In 1953 Gill won permission for the enlarged facility to take the name "Central High School."<sup>4</sup>

Gill was further aided by national developments on the civil rights front. In 1950 the NAACP won the Supreme Court case Sweatt v. Painter, which held that henceforth Southern districts must provide facilities which were truly equal.<sup>5</sup> The full promise of the ruling was never fulfilled, but some improvements did come to Asheboro. In 1952 officials erected a gymnasium building behind Central High, ending the era when students had to move chairs out of the auditorium to clear space for games. A few years later the authorities granted money for the construction of a small free-standing classroom building for elementary education.

The same forces that brought the grudging upgrading of Central School eventually led to its closing. In 1954 the NAACP won the landmark ruling in the case Brown v Board of Education that declared that separate education for the races should be ended. Rather than upgrade substandard historically black facilities, school officials often simply closed black schools. In 1964 high school students were transferred from Central, and it briefly became an elementary school. In 1969 it closed completely.<sup>6</sup> The building was used sporadically by the Board of Education for a sheltered workshop and for other semi-educational functions, but eventually it was auctioned off.

In 1981 the school was purchased by the East Side Improvement Association. The neighborhood group revitalized the gym as a community recreation facility, remodeled the elementary ed building as a day-care center, and laid plans to convert the main structure into

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> James Morgan, undated oral history interview with Asheboro newspaperman Chip Womack, in the files of the East Side Improvement Association.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> J. N. Gill, undated oral history interview by Asheboro newspaperman Chip Womack, in the files of the East Side Improvement Association.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Board of Trustees of Asheboro City Schools, Minutes of Meetings, January 15 and March 4, 1948.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Board of Trustees of Asheboro City Schools, Minutes of Meetings, March 12, 1953.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Kluger, Simple Justice, pp. 249 - 280.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Whatley, <u>Architectural History of Randolph County</u>, p. 236.

## **United States Department of the Interior** National Park Service

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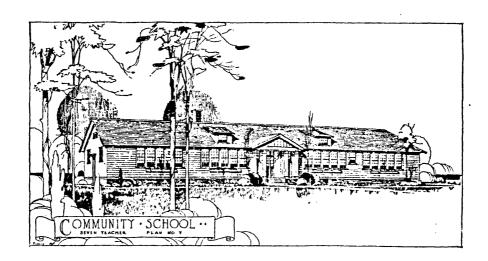
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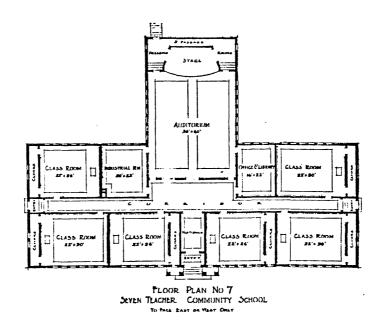
senior citizens housing. Today, the Asheboro Rosenwald school continues its historic function as a center of the East Side African-American community.

# **National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet**

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#### COMMUNITY SCHOOL PLANS





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# **National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 1 of 1 Central School, Randolph County, NC

#### Verbal Boundary Description

Begining at a point at the northeast edge of the public street right-of-way at the intersection of Watkins Street and Frank Street;

proceeding along the edge of Watkins Street northwest 71.87 feet to a point, then continuing along the edge of Watkins Street northeast 280.91 feet to a point, then continuing along the edge of Watkins Street northeast 70.38 feet to a point at the southeast edge of the public street right-of-way at the intersection of Watkins and Brewer Street;

then proceeding along the edge of Brewer Street southeast 97.23 feet to a point, then continuing along the edge of Brewer Street southeast 103.35 feet to a point in the school driveway;

then proceeding along the approximate centerline of the school driveway southwest 212.29 feet to a point, then continuing along the driveway southwest 19.01 feet to a point, then continuing along the approximate centerline of the driveway southwest 178.82 feet to a point at the north edge of the public street right-of-way of Frank Street;

then proceeding along the edge of Frank Street northwest 180.0 feet to the beginning point.

#### Verbal Boundary Justification

The site is bounded on the north by Brewer Street, on the west by Watkins Street, on the south by Frank Street, and on the east by a driveway and parking area, as shown by a bold line on the enclosed plat prepared for the East Side Improvement Association, Inc., 11 - 18 - 92. The nominated tract includes the 1926 school building and its 1948 wing, along with contiguous land. The driveway and parking area separate this tract from the later portion of the school complex to the east, which is not nominated.

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Central School, Randolph County, NC

### **Photographs**

Central School 414 Watkins Street Asheboro, Randolph County North Carolina

Photographer, Thomas W. Hanchett Negatives on file with NC Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, NC

- 1. Front elevation, 1926 building (camera pointing southeast)
  June 1993
- 2. Front elevation, 1926 building and 1948 wing (camera pointing southeast)
  April 1992
- 3. Rear elevation, 1948 wing (camera pointing southwest)
  April 1992
- 4. Rear (northeast) elevation, 1926 building and 1948 wing (camera pointing southwest)
  April 1992
- 5. Rear (southeast) elevation, 1926 building, also showing 1952 gymnasium building (camera pointing northwest)
  April 1992
- 6. Interior, 1926 building, auditorium (camera pointing southeast)
  April 1992
- 7. Interior, 1926 building, northeast rear classroom (camera pointing southwest)
  April 1992
- 8. Interior, 1926 building, showing typical breeze window, wainscot, cloakroom door (camera pointing southeast)
  April 1992

